

THE WITCH OF PRAGUE.

A Fantastic Tale.

By F. MARION CRAWFORD, Author of "MR. ISAACS," "DR. CLAUDIUS," "A ROMAN SINGER," Etc.

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CHAPTER XXII.—(Continued.)

The Wanderer drew a long breath of relief as he helped Keyork to make the necessary arrangements.

"How long will it last?" he inquired.

"How long can I tell?" returned Keyork. "I have never heard of a synagogue being burned down in any city. Do you know nothing about any?"

"I produced a bottle containing some very strong salt and was applying it to the corners of the eyes. The Wanderer paid no attention to his irritative temper and went on his way. A long time passed, and yet the Wanderer had no further signs of consciousness.

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thought, that no one came to put out the lamp. He thought of looking out into the vestibule beyond, to see whether the lights were still burning there. To his great surprise he found the door securely fastened. Keyork Arabian had undoubtedly locked him in, and to all intents and purposes he was a prisoner. He suspected some treachery, but in this he was mistaken. Keyork's sole intention had been to insure himself from being disturbed in the course of the night by a second visit from the Wanderer, accompanied perhaps by Kaffa. It immediately occurred to the Wanderer that he could ring the bell. Somebody would certainly come and let him out. But, disliking the idea of entering into an explanation, he reserved that for an emergency. Had he attempted it, he would have been still further surprised to find that he would have produced no result. In going through the vestibule, Keyork had used Kaffa's sharp knife to cut out one of the slender silk-covered copper wires which passed out of the conservatory on that side, communicating with the servants' quarters. He was perfectly acquainted with all such details of the household arrangements.

Keyork's precautions were in reality useless, and they merely illustrated the ruthless selfishness of the man. The Wanderer would in all probability neither have attempted to leave the house with Kaffa that night, nor to communicate with the servants, even if he had been left free to do either, and if no one had disturbed him in his watch. He was disturbed, however, and very unexpectedly, between 1:30 and 1:45 a. m.

More than once he had remained seated for a long time, but his eyes were growing heavy, and he roused himself and walked again until he was thoroughly awake. It was certainly true that all the persons concerned in the events of the day, except Keyork, had had undergone the least bodily fatigue and mental excitement. But even to the strongest, the hours of the night spent in watching by a sick person seem endless, when there is not really strong personal anxiety felt. He was undoubtedly interested in Kaffa's fate, and was resolved to protect him from any act of folly. But he had not met him for the first time for very afternoon, and the first instance suggested even the possibility of a friendship between the two. His position toward Israel Kaffa was altogether unexpected, and what he felt was more than pity for his sufferings, and indignation against those who had caused them.

When the door was suddenly opened he stood still in his walk and faced it. He hardly recognized Urona in the pale, disheveled woman with circled eyes, who came toward him under the bright light. She too, stood still when she saw him, staring suddenly, she seemed to be very cold, for she shivered visibly, and her teeth were chattering. Without the least protection against the bitter night air, she had laid her head and shoulders against the open doorway from the church to her home.

"You here!" she exclaimed in an unsteady voice.

"Yes, I am still here," answered the Wanderer. "But I hardly expected you to come back to-night," he added.

At the sound of his voice a strange smile came into her wan face, and indeed there she had come to hear him speak again, kindly or unkindly, for she had come with the fixed determination to meet her death at Israel Kaffa's hands, and to let that be the end. And all the while thoughts that had whirled through her brain as she ran home in the dark, that one had not once changed.

"And Israel Kaffa?" she asked, almost timidly.

"He is there—alive," answered the Wanderer.

Urona came forward and the Wanderer showed her where the man lay upon a thick carpet, wrapped in his pale head supported by a cushion.

"He is very ill," she said, almost under her breath. "Tell me what has happened."

"It was like a dream to him. The tremendous excitement of what had happened in the convent had cut her off from the realization of what had come before. Strange as it seemed, she knew that she comprehended the intimate connection between the two series of events, not the bearing of the one upon the other. Israel Kaffa sank into such indifference that she began to pity his condition, and it was hard to remember that the Wanderer was the man whom Beatrice had loved, and of whom she had spoken so long and so passionately. She found too, an unexpected joy in being once more by his side, no matter under what conditions. In that happiness, one-sided and unshared, she forgot everything else.

Beatrice had been a dream, a vision, an unreal shadow. Kaffa was nothing to her, and yet everything, as she suddenly saw, since he constituted a bond between her and the man she loved, which would at least outlast the night. In a dash she saw that the Wanderer would not leave her alone with the Moravian, and that the latter could not be moved for the present without danger to his life. They must watch together by his side through the long hours. Who could tell what the night would bring forth?

As the new development of the situation presented itself, the color rose again to her cheeks. The warmth of the conservatory, too, dispelled the chill that had penetrated her, and the familiar odors of the flowers contributed to restore the lost equilibrium of mind and body.

"Tell me what has happened!" she said again.

"In the fewest possible words the Wanderer told her all that had occurred up to the moment of her coming, not omitting the detail of the locked door.

"And for what reason do you suppose that Keyork shut you in?" she asked.

"I do not know," the Wanderer answered. "I do not trust him, though I have known him so long."

"It was mere selfishness," said Urona, scornfully. "I know him better than you do."

Her manner was more natural and quiet than it had been since the moment of Kaffa's appearance in the conservatory. The Wanderer noticed that there was an element of real sadness in it, with a leaven of disappointment and a savor of heartfelt contrition. She was in earnest now, as she had been before, but in a different way. He could hardly refuse her a word in answer.

"Urona," he said, gravely, "remember that you are leaving me no choice. I cannot leave you alone with that poor fellow, and so, whatever you wish to say, I must hear. But it would be much better to say nothing about what has happened this evening—better for you and me. Neither man nor woman always mean exactly what they say. We are not angels. Is it not best to let the matter drop?"

Urona listened quietly, her eyes upon his face.

"You are not so hard with me as you were," she said, thoughtfully with a moment's hesitation, and there was a touch of gratitude in her voice. As she felt the dim possibility of a return to her former life, she began to think of the scene in the church seemed to be very far away. Again the Wanderer found it difficult to answer.

"It is not wise to be hard, as you call it," he said quietly. There was a scarcely perceptible smile on his face, brought there

do. He was afraid you would disturb him again in the night."

The Wanderer said nothing, wondering how an man could be so elaborately thoughtful of his own comfort.

"There is no help for it," Urona said, "we must watch together."

"I see no other way," the Wanderer answered indifferently.

He placed a chair for her to sit in, within sight of the sick man, and took one himself, wondering at the strange situation, and yet not caring to ask Urona what had brought her back, so breathless and so pale, at such an hour. He believed, not unreasonably, that her motive had been either anxiety for himself or the irresistible longing to see him again, coupled with a distrust of his promise to return when she should send for him. It seemed best to accept her appearance without question, lest an inquiry should lead to a fresh outburst, more unbearable now than before, since there seemed to be no way of leaving the house without exposing her to danger. A nervous man like Israel Kaffa might spring up at any moment and do something desperate.

After they had taken their places the silence lasted some moments. Then the Wanderer said to himself that it was a pity that this evening," said Urona, softly, with an interrogation in her voice.

"I did not," the Wanderer answered, quietly.

"I am glad of that—I was mad when I spoke."

CHAPTER XXIII.

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not by any feeling of satisfaction, but by his sense of his own almost laughable perplexity. He saw that he was very near being deceived in the ridiculous notion of giving her some advice of the paternal kind. "It is not for me, either, to talk to you of what you have done to Israel Kaffa to-day," he said, "I see no other way," the Wanderer answered indifferently.

He placed a chair for her to sit in, within sight of the sick man, and took one himself, wondering at the strange situation, and yet not caring to ask Urona what had brought her back, so breathless and so pale, at such an hour. He believed, not unreasonably, that her motive had been either anxiety for himself or the irresistible longing to see him again, coupled with a distrust of his promise to return when she should send for him. It seemed best to accept her appearance without question, lest an inquiry should lead to a fresh outburst, more unbearable now than before, since there seemed to be no way of leaving the house without exposing her to danger. A nervous man like Israel Kaffa might spring up at any moment and do something desperate.

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"I am glad of that—I was mad when I spoke."

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Wanderer was not inclined to deny the statement, which accorded well enough with his total disbelief of the story Urona had told him. But he did not answer her immediately, for he found himself in a very difficult position. He would neither do anything in the least discourteous, beyond admitting frankly that he had not believed her when she taxed him with incredulity; nor would say anything which might serve her as a stepping-stone for returning to the original situation. He was, perhaps, inclined to blame her somewhat less than at first, and her changed manner in speaking of Kaffa somewhat encouraged his leniency. A man will forgive, or at least condone, much harshness to others when he is thoroughly aware that it has been exhibited out of love for himself; and he

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